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FIVE YEARS A CATHOLIC.



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FIVE YEARS A CATHOLIC.

LONDON:
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FIVE YEARS A CATHOLIC:

WITH

INCIDENTS OF FOREIGN

CONVENT LIFE.

BY ELIZA SMITH.



LONDON:
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PREFACE.

IN sending forth the following pages before the public, I perhaps owe it to myself to say a few words in explanation of the motives which have actuated me—as, of course, I cannot help being aware that I have laid myself open to much criticism, a considerable share of which will, most likely, be of a hostile character.

It is obviously painful to a mind possessing any susceptibility to oppose the views, or wound the feelings, of those whom it is bound to love and esteem, more especially where personal kindness, and, in many instances, multiplied favours, would form the strongest inducement—if anything could—to a different course. In this awkward situation, however, I am placed ; and, while feeling its really distressing nature

to the very utmost extent of which a grateful heart is capable, I have yet no choice left me to do otherwise than I have done, by the imperative voice of that internal monitor to which all must submit.

Some time since, I became a convert to the Catholic faith; and, as a few who peruse these pages may be aware, in the ardour of feeling attendant on the step, published a little work, adapted for the young, in vindication of my adopted tenets. Since that time, by a number of circumstances, as unforeseen as they have been singular, and by a course of *heart working* —a very small share of which I have feebly attempted to delineate in the work now before you—I became convinced of the fallacy of the views I had embraced, and their essential errors both in doctrine and practice; and as a natural, indeed inevitable consequence, was led to regret my former hasty step in advocating them as I had done. As in that little work I remarked, “*truth can be but one*,” and, therefore, if, as I *believe now before God*, my present views of

justification by faith alone, through the merits of the *One* Mediator, be that truth, the doctrines therein set forth are dangerous error. Under this conviction—though without any idea that there is sufficient merit in the thing to ensure it a circulation extensive enough to do much injury—I, of course, felt it in the highest degree obligatory, if only for the satisfaction of my own mind, to endeavour, as early as possible, by a candid avowal of my change of sentiment, and the advocacy of the views I now believe most consonant with truth—to counteract, as far as in my power, whatsoever amount it may have been instrumental in effecting.

Another motive, too, influenced me, hardly less constraining; and that was, to give my former friends, for whom I still feel the same degree of esteem and affection as I have ever felt, and the memory of whose kindness will always be dear to me, an opportunity of revoking the harsh judgment they may be disposed to form of me, by a fair statement of the feelings and causes which have led to the change; and

I flatter myself that they must appeal sufficiently to any liberal and generous mind, to convince it that neither human interest or fickleness have had any share in operating it. With this brief comment, and careless alike of the sarcasm of ignorance, and criticism of uncharitableness and malevolence, I leave the whole matter in the hands of that God who reads the heart, and judgeth not according to man's judgment.

CONVENT LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

“ If I am right, Thy grace impart,
Still in the right to stay;
If I am wrong, oh teach my heart
To find that better way !”

It was a delightful evening in early spring. One of those premature summer evenings, closing a day which from its warmth and brilliance had proclaimed itself in advance of the season—glowing and beautiful as that season usually is. The sky was cloudless, and the air invigorating, without its usual admixture of chilliness, while vegetation appeared in a state of forwardness and luxuriance, which gave promise, if nipped by no unkindly winds, of a plentiful supply of heaven's bounties. In a beautiful convent garden on the continent, rich in all that could attract the eye or please the taste, a young lady, in the prime of youth, was wandering alone. She was dressed in secular attire, though plainly, and had as yet no mark of the religious garb to distinguish her from the world. For a long time she walked slowly and thoughtfully, and there was a shade of pensiveness in the expression of her

face, coupled with a certain pallor, that betokened some, if not much, suffering, both mental and physical. More than once her lips moved as if in prayer: but if so, it was silent, for no other sound broke the stillness than the distant voices of the community, ever and anon borne on the breeze, as they escaped from the open windows of the chapel on the right, in which they were reciting their evening office. The time, the place, the hour, the fitful tones, were all impressive; and to an imaginative spectator might have partaken of the character of the romantic, if not poetical. But the countenance of the young lady gave traces of emotions too deep for mere sentimentalism, or poet's dreaming: a violent struggle, at length, appeared to be going on within—her lips quivered, her cheek became more pale, and something akin to convulsion agitated her brow. At last the tears gushed forth, and raising her eyes to the fair heaven above her, through their glittering mist, she exclaimed in accents touching, though suppressed—"Oh my God, show me Thy truth! Can it be that this is right? Canst thou demand such cruel, dread oblation? Canst thou require the severing asunder of ties thou thyself hast formed? the annihilation of affections thou thyself hast implanted? the crushing thus of every sympathy and emotion deemed most holy? the destruction of the high will and freedom which are the heritage of heaven? *Must man thus become a slave in mind, in will, in person, to the most abject despotism—*

and be reduced to the lowest point of humiliation, in order to discover the *highest* path to thee? Art thou not Love? Is not this thy essential character? and dost thou not delight to see thy favourite creature happy? And does love manifest itself thus? Can this, can this be? Oh my God, teach me! I am bewildered. I wander as in a mist of darkness, from which there is no escape. Teach me, teach me thy truth."

As she concluded her prayer, her tears ceased, and though unobserved, the uncertain tones of the sisters' voices had ceased also. Coming towards her, she descried a nun in the full habit of the order, who, from her staid demeanour and mature countenance, might be judged to be as ripe in years as in her religious profession. And so indeed it proved; she holding the office next in command to the Rev. Mother, viz., second superioress of the community. It was a good countenance, with strong benevolence marked upon it. Laying her hand gently on the girl's shoulder, she said, looking inquiringly at her, " You are not well, Isabel; the evening air will injure you: come into the house." The young lady was in that state of feverish excitement when, after a form of speech, *air* seemed *life*, and she remonstratingly pleaded—" I only want the air. I do not think it will harm me. Let me stay."

But the lady had her own peculiar views on that as well as every other subject; one of which was, that the free action of the air, either

through coolness of apparel, or too copious an inhalation of it, was the source of almost every ailment that flesh is heir to ; and she firmly replied :

“ No! no! you must come in at once, if for nought else, for obedience.”

The latter virtue was what the young lady professedly came there to learn, so swallowing a sigh, she went. To do the good superioress justice, she tried to be kind, and, as the young lady was a postulant, and yet new to the requirements of her situation, made an attempt for a short time to engage her thoughts in conversation. But it would not do. The thoughts were at that time roving far from her, and the gloomy little room into which she had been led; and wandering, with a keenness of feeling and vividness of imagination she herself could hardly account for, to scenes, and places, and faces, she had tried long, and hard, and prayerfully to banish—until the tears rose so often, and so scaldingly, that each moment the torrent threatened to overleap its barriers. With a hurried accent, and earnestness of manner, she apologised for her emotion, on the score of indisposition, and entreated the superioress to leave her alone until the hour of supper, by which time she doubted not rest and quiet would have restored her. Her wish was complied with, and again alone, she bent her knees in the attitude of prayer. I say attitude, for her lips in vain strove to speak. Her *thoughts rose* in too wild a chaos, and her *feelings gushed* too overmasteringly, for her to be

able to define, much less express them ; even had she dared to attempt to do so, enslaved as she was by the fetters her own sincerity had cast around her, which made her regard them as highly culpable. Yet come they would, without let or hinderance : a thousand doubts, and fears, and questionings, of distressing and unanswerable import—all mingled with early associations and long forgotten ideas, each inimical to her present position. The chest heaved with the tumult, and “ God help me ! Jesus save me ! ” was mentally ejaculated, as the only resource against the overpowering hurricane of emotion. In the midst, the bell summoning the community to the refectory, for the last evening meal, resounded through the building ; and hastily rising, with a strong effort at self-control, she passed out and joined the crowd—seventy in number—now flocking towards it. She entered with them, and was taking her seat, when the superioress before named—whom we shall call Mother Cecile—and who was passing to hers at the time, stopped, and inquired in a low tone, “ How are you now, Isabel ? ”

“ Better,” she replied, smiling mechanically, “ much better.” The lady seemed pleased, and passed on.

There was silence in the refectory that evening, broken only by the reading, during a part of the time, of a book of spiritual instruction. Indeed, we may remark in passing, that in this order it is a rule to observe total silence, with the aforementioned exception, always during

meals, unless it be a festival, or there be some special occasion of recreation, when leave is given to talk. Isabel sat, after a vain effort to eat, struggling painfully to repress any outward traces of the storm raging within. This she managed until the end of the meal to effect; but the exertion was too much. Her nervous system had been completely overwrought, and all her energies were strained to their utmost tension. Physical strength, long much undermined by mental conflict, suddenly gave way, and on rising to leave the place, she fell back fainting into the arms of her nearest companion. Hastily they conveyed her to bed, and did all that kindness could suggest to promote her recovery. This was for the time successful, and she soon awoke to consciousness. But sleep forsook her eyelids. Through the long night, even until the early bell called the self-denying sisterhood to the prayers and labours of another day, did she lie restless and feverish—the unresisting prey to uneasy and anxious thoughts she could neither reply to nor repress. Still, ever and anon, came the same deeply-breathed prayer, being the only one that then she could frame even mentally: "God aid me! Jesus teach me."

The young lady was a convert of five years' standing to the Catholic faith, and had recently arrived at the convent. When quite a girl—having been from childhood addicted to habits of premature thought—she had, leaning to the pride of her understanding, though she *then knew it not*, forsaken the simple creed of

her fathers to embrace that, which was at this moment the occasion of so much uneasiness. Yet was she perfectly sincere in so doing, and had in truth not only read and thought much, but prayed long and earnestly. Her mind, however, but imperfectly regulated, and with principles not as yet fully formed, and being accustomed on all occasions to think and act freely for herself, she had reasoned, speculated, and pronounced judgment, on all those manifold questions that seem to poor humanity to bear the mark of incongruity in God's dealings with his creatures ; and had passed so boldly into the regions of doubt and scepticism, that she knew not what she believed of the revealed economy of salvation, or whether she believed at all. Forgetting that where man's wisdom ends that of God begins, and that where reason's glimmering ray fails, obscured by the clouds and mists of sense, the star of faith appears as an emanation from the right hand of the Eternal, to guide through the darkness, until it leads safely to the clear fruition of sight, where all that is mysterious shall be revealed in noon-day radiance, and all that our limited intelligence fails to understand shall be at once grasped and fully comprehended ; she had become even deeply involved in that *negative* system of unbelief which, while it manifests itself not *openly*, but retains all the properties and seeming virtues of life, has yet proved the rock on which thousands have split and been eternally engulfed. In this dark and *unhappy state of mind*, yet with a heart keenly

alive to the perfect and the beautiful, and intelligence to apprehend them wherever found ; with affections even going actively and constantly in search of them, through broken channels and muddy waters—Isabel Lefevre, for the gratification of an hour, and partly too to satisfy some poetical kind of interest she felt in the subject, from its seemingly intimate association with the chivalrous past, after satiating her thirst for information from every other available source, had seized with eagerness on some books, which came in her way, treating of the ancient faith. And so different did she find the portrait of it in them from that which its opponents love to paint, and so fair and perfect did the theory appear, so like what her poor human imagination had dreamed of as likely to have been given by God—in short, so in consonance with our finite views of grandeur and sublimity—always, alas ! modelled too near the earth, the clouds of which enwrap them—that her surprise and pleasure excited sympathy, the hand-maiden of love ; and reading on and on, becoming more enchain'd as the vision grew more glowing, the *heart* was taken prisoner, even before the *intellect* ; and without stopping to examine in minutiae the details of a fabric which promised so fair, she became led away, as many before her have been, by an *ideal* never to be realised—the very victim of her own aspirings after the truthful and the pure. Here, after all her distractions, she at length found *quiet*—after all her doubts and darkness, *certainty and light*. It was *faith* she wanted, not

opinion : and here was faith, definite and arbitrary enough to satisfy the most zealous worshipper at its shrine. Here was the pearl of price she had long been seeking—the choice garden of exotics in the midst of an unlovely and barren wilderness. Poor girl ! the wilderness had been her own heart, the darkness and uncertainty the offspring of an unformed and erring intellect. Yet did she, as I said before, pray much, and very sincerely too ; and her *purpose* as well as sympathy being strengthened, as is almost invariably the case, by the opposition she was destined on every hand to encounter, she believed, after much struggling and many perplexities, that she had attained the goal of her long-cherished wishes, and found the pathway in which she ought to walk. So believing, she threw her whole heart, her soul, her talents, into the arena ; and despite all conflicting elements, and many a shaft of opposition from those she loved, which keenly put her resolve to trial, she succeeded in consummating her intention ; deeming that, in each sacrifice she was called upon to make, she offered an oblation well pleasing to God. Many and bitter were the tears then often shed in secret, at the coldness of former friends, the estrangement of those she most loved on earth, and the sentence, too, which she knew the misjudging world would pronounce. Its free censure, and unfeeling condemnation of her motives and opinions—the laugh of the coarse-minded, the sneer of the ignorant, the gibe of those, sure to be most loud, who had never

thought, or read a page on the subject in their lives—all these to a sensitive mind like hers, though *sometimes* she could estimate them at their own contemptible worth, yet at others had their share of bitterness. But still she paused not, faltered not, hesitated not. Strong in her belief, each fresh trial, every added pang, but increased the value of the holocaust, and elevating it in her eyes, constrained her to proceed. And so sincere was she, so strong in her sense of right, and the truth of her cause, that from being before in heart indifferent and careless as to the practical teachings and requirements of religion, she now became edifying, fervent, and devout—a zealous follower of all she knew and believed to be good. To so high a pitch was her conviction carried, that every inconsistency in her new creed—and it is in vain to deny that from time to time there were many which struck upon her—which came in contact with her better judgment, was zealously sought to be explained away; or if that could not be, covered over with the capacious mantle of the church's infallibility; while all reasoning or doubting on the subject was put away as heretical and heterodox. Constantly and perseveringly this system was adopted, as being the readiest way of silencing questioning, and restoring tranquillity to her mind. And, indeed, it was needed,—for many a serious difficulty and doubt, that caused a pause at *first*, were frequently occurring. At length, however, all *were put to flight* by this ingenious method of *proceeding, and no more fervent and docile*

child of the church existed than Isabel Lefevre. I have sometimes thought that at that time, had needs existed, she would have made a fervent martyr. She began to read the lives of the saints, and books of ascetical piety ; and the ardour of her imagination being excited, and all her religious enthusiasm aroused, by their stirring details and recitals, she commenced in practice to attempt to carry out some trifling part of what she saw there, and in secret sighed for—what her social position at present forbade—liberty to proceed as her fervour and inclination dictated. The heroism of *entire* self-devotedness, the renouncing *all* for God, touched a chord that vibrated through all the loftier and more generous emotions of her soul, while it seemed to promise fair to fill that soul's capacity—which alas ! all here below had heretofore fallen, how short ! of effecting. The idea was noble, grand, sublime, worthy of being Heaven's own inspiration ; and many an aspiration and prayer were sent upward, that if it were God's will, the path might be opened for its fulfilment. To dwell in the courts of God while on earth, to hold intercourse with heaven and its angels, even while inhabiting this tenement of clay—to be the chosen, the beloved of God, and for *His* to forsake every *other* love, was something to lift the soul beyond the ordinary sphere of mortality. The energy of mind, too, requisite to overturn the strongholds of the *will*, the total annihilation of self and selfishness—this also appealed (in oh how subtle a *disguise* !) to the pride of nature ; and while,

indeed in very blindness and *wilfulness*, the soul was thus seeking to be its *own* saviour, and wandering far from the way "of God in Christ," made it appear that it was endeavouring to attain to the lowest depths of humility, and seeking the closest fellowship and communion with heaven.

But the sincere in heart are never suffered to wander finally, if long, and so in this case it proved. But we will not fore-stall. While in this state of mind, a heavy domestic trial befel Isabel. It was one of the keenest that can visit the young and warm heart: the death of a beloved parent. Sadly had she marked the slow but sure progress of decay, and hung in anguish over the dear form so soon about to be lost to her for ever. She stood by the death couch, too, and watched the dying agonies, and there learnt a lesson only to fade with life. The remorseless arrow planted in her mother's heart had extended its envenomed influence to hers; and for the first time she learned that worst of all bitterness, the desolation of spirit attendant on eternal separation from one who has hitherto been a protector from ill, and defence in the hour of trial and adversity. But this was not all. That death-scene had been a peculiarly solemn and impressive one; well calculated to a mind, even *less* sensitively alive than hers, to serious influences—to awaken thought and solicitude for the future. And all her previous desires and *convictions* had been much strengthened by it. *It seemed as though all was nought to eternity*

—as though nothing on earth could be put in comparison for an instant with the soul's salvation. She had watched the dread moment when the sands of life had run out, until but a grain remained in the glass, and had *felt* the infinite littleness of all that the world *then* had to give. And henceforth began a *new* era of her existence—one of increased fervour, of entire self-abnegation. Yet still remained ties to life, and ties as binding as beloved ; and at the thought of severing these, her eyes wept bitter tears, and, if the expression is admissible, her heart tears of blood. Yes, she must quit the playmates of childhood, the friends of riper years, the sharers of common hopes and sorrows, the kind and faithful under every circumstance of life. And *this* loss made them dearer than ever—she *could not* part with them *now*. If it had been difficult before, it was under these circumstances impossible. She dared not contemplate it. And yet something within told her she *must* ; seemed to whisper, amidst doubts, and fears, and anguish, there was no alternative, if she wished to save her soul. Oh ! *how* she prayed, wept, and struggled, and again prayed. All in vain. The idea had obtained firm possession of her mind ; and whether from a morbid state of the imagination induced by recent suffering, or from the influence of disguised temptation, she could not shake it off ; and dark views of the *justice* of God alone, to the entire exclusion of his love and mercy, haunted her continually. She could see but the account to be rendered at the last of each

word and action, and looked not to "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," stepping in to deprive the sword of its avenging power. She gazed upon Mount Sinai alone, without remembering Calvary; and converting Him, who is *touched* with a feeling of our infirmities, into a hard task-master, whom, by the renunciation of everything that makes life tolerable, we must endeavour constantly to propitiate, felt *this* stringent motive also added to the somewhat more attractive ones already at work, to *compel* her to take a course which she now knew no choice to avoid. Some time before her parent's death, she had consulted a priest of her acquaintance—himself a *religieux*—upon her predilections for the conventional life, and had received the highest encouragement. Again, in her present distress and difficulty, she applied to him, telling him fully her state of mind, and showing the insuperable barrier raised *now* to her convictions, in the love and duty she owed to her remaining relatives. Unable to think, act, or decide for herself, she determined to receive his advice as an oracle from God, and if possible to follow it to the very letter; thus by a blind obedience endeavouring to remove some part of the responsibility, if she could not blunt the refinement of suffering. It came at last, exactly what she expected. "Nature was nature, and we could not help feeling. But beyond a certain point, it must not be regarded. Nay, the *extremity* of its susceptibility, if not yielded to,

became a source of greater merit; and we ought rather to rejoice in an occasion of suffering than seek to elude it." Firmly Isabel believed it, and struggled to act up to her belief. But the moment just then was inopportune. Recent sorrow and mental conflict had undermined her physical strength, and her powers of endurance appeared unequal to the trial of another such strain upon them for the present. So again she remonstrated, and pleaded at least for a respite, until things appeared more promising.

The same reply in effect—but this time couched in stronger language: "Delay was tampering with the enemy of souls; and if God *called* to *His* service, all mere human love must yield at once and unresistingly to the call."

This time there was no remonstrance. He whom her creed taught her to regard as in the place of God had spoken; and cost what it would, she had no resource but to listen. She wept, and prayed, and struggled; and with bitterness of heart, amidst the reproaches of her friends, and the rash judgment of her enemies, made the sacrifice, which only He to whom it was offered up, and who could read the heart, to the day of eternity will ever be able to appreciate. Men look on the surface of things, and how very, very little, oft, can discern what lies beneath! Ah! if they could, or would pause to gaze deeper, how many a heartache would be averted, how many a sweeping sen-

tence of condemnation unrecorded—how many an acid and burning word would pause upon the tongue, and wound not the already wounded spirit! How many a sorrow would be soothed where now it is afresh laid open—how many a breach of charity repaired, and scandal to Christianity prevented! how many a cankering, blighting thirst for vengeance, prompted by wrongs *too* real, fade away before the kindly breath of conciliation and atonement! How much scathing woe may be prevented, and happiness secured! How much nearer, in fine, may man approach to the image of his Maker; and more perfectly approximate to the fulfilment of that sublime command, “Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.” But there is a malice in human nature which perversely seeks to dwell upon the darkest side of things, and judges only—poor purblind arbiter!—from external seeming. And well is it for man, that while His *fellow*s thus look on mere outward appearance, “*God* looketh at the heart.”

Isabel Lefevre tore herself from all she loved, or cared for, or esteemed on earth. Desolate in mind, and bereaved in heart, she quitted those who alone could have assuaged her sorrow, or could ever understand its depth. She left her home, her childhood’s home, endeared by many a hallowed association, and every scene to which she was bound by sympathy and interest. She went forth, the reproached *of her kindred*, the censured of her friends, the

jeered at by her enemies, the idle wonder of all ;—and on a foreign shore, amidst alien scenes and stranger faces, with no voice to greet her that spoke even her own tongue, she stood alone with God : of *Him* to be judged whether she had done well or evil. And this judgment was rapidly speeding to its issue when we introduced her to the reader.

CHAPTER II.

" For my sick soul is darken'd unto death,
With shadows from the suffering it hath seen :
The strong foundations of mine ancient faith
Sink from beneath me—whereon shall I lean ?"

SINCE Isabel's entrance within the convent, indeed since her arrival on the continent, her mind had been, by imperceptible degrees, undergoing a change, which, though as yet she knew it not, threatened to result in a mighty revolution of her feelings and sentiments. From the first struggling desire, to the half-formed purpose, and then all through the final and trying resolve and execution, her sole prayer had been, " Thy will be done !" Even while on board the steamer bound for her destination, she had written in the intensity of her feelings, on the back of an old letter—the only accommodation at command—the following prayer :* " Behold, O my sweet Saviour, here is my heart. Take it from this very moment with all its powers, with all its affections, with every hope, thought, wish, desire, and imagination, it does *now* or will ever know. With all *it* and *I* am at this moment, or ever shall be at every moment of my future life, take

* This prayer is copied literally.

it, and do with it as thou wilt; only conform it to thine, and totally subdue it to thy Divine and holy will: take, and seal it for thy service; let it ever seek to love and know thee *only*; let no other creature have any share in its affections—nail it to thy cross! And I pray thee, oh, I pray thee, let me die a thousand deaths rather than live to wander from thee! Behold me, O my gracious Saviour, accept my poor offering, and make me *all* thine—a pure and perfect holocaust to thee, both now and for ever, in time and eternity! Amen."

This prayer she cherished as in some sort the record of her more tangible dedication to her Maker; and often and often in the course of the day was it in spirit repeated. Instinctively a confidence sprung up in her heart, that the will she so earnestly sought to know, would be accomplished in her, and by her, whatever it might prove to be. She had *hope* in God, though it was not an *assured* and well-defined hope. It was the hope that guides us on, tremblingly, to the things which as yet we know not,—the hope that pants after future blessings, not as yet attained. Yet still was the darkness thick, the gloom well-nigh palpable. From the moment of her setting foot within a continental church—which was within the first hour of her arrival on continental ground—she had been pained, puzzled, startled, by her own sceptical and contradictory feelings. Never having *seen* the Catholic faith otherwise developed outwardly than as in England, she

was ill prepared for the extreme length to which many of its demonstrations were carried here. It is true she had read much at home of what was done in other countries, but still reading and witnessing were two distinct things ; and she felt at once that Catholicism in England, and Catholicism abroad, were widely, if not entirely dissimilar. The great number of altars dedicated in one church to peculiar saints, each surmounted by some large figure splendidly attired, or some emblem illustrative of the miraculous, in his or her life or actions ; the ponderous images of the virgin mother of our Saviour clothed in the most gay, often grotesque attire, to many of which was attached some legend, or more recent record of the marvellous ; the crowds of devotees bending lowly before these "works of men's hands," often presenting trophies of some granted favour, or tributary offering in gratitude for benefits received through the intercession of those they represented, all struck upon Isabel's mind, with a force she could not overmaster, with a sense of the puerile and frivolous, if not profane and idolatrous. The light that had once been in her had not yet become so densely dark, as not to reflect back some glimmerings of a purer day. And she could not thus see the "glory of God given to another," without a strange recoiling which of late she had not known. Yet, astonishing to say, she regarded these feelings as sin, as the temptations of the evil one to shake her faith and rob her *of her peace*, and as such she combated them

with all the power of which she was mistress. Once, in going round a magnificent cathedral, a gentleman, otherwise well-informed, and evidently intellectual, was recounting to her some story of a large image of the blessed virgin, which surmounted a Lady altar, and which had procured it the reputation of a miraculous image; and the details were so childishly absurd, that she involuntarily turned her head to hide the momentary smile of contempt. The next instant—so far had she proceeded in self-deception—struck with remorse for her offence, she mentally implored pardon of *her* whose representation she had derided; and reproaching herself for her *powerlessness* to *believe all* she wished, called to mind some words she had lately read in a work of one of the canonized saints, with reference to doubts and fears, and applied them to such as those that beset her. “If you *wish* to believe, you *do* believe”—consoling herself with the assurance that at least her *wishes* were unquestionable. But all would not do. She tried in vain to cheat and blind herself, ingenious as she was in the effort. Beyond a certain point her faith would *not* carry her; and every argument and sophistry—and, O how constantly were each, by turns, called into operation!—which she had learnt from books, and the reasonings of her own mind, were utterly in vain. What worlds would she have given then to have been brought up a Catholic, to have had the same unhesitating simplicity of belief which *they* possessed. How earnestly did she

sigh for the extinction of the last ray of light which yet distinguished her from those whose darkness she was so anxious to emulate! But the will of God had yet to be accomplished—that will she had so earnestly sought—and it was leading her, “by a way she knew not,” to the summit of all her long-cherished aspirations. Thus she arrived at the convent, with—as she thought—many an internal subject for remorse and self-reproach; and determined by the fervour of her entrance on all the duties of her vocation, and rigorous practice of every act of mortification and self-sacrifice within her reach, to atone, as far as in her lay, for what, while it was unavoidable, yet weighed so heavily on her conscience. And she began too fervently, for neither rest, ease, health, or even life, was weighed in the balance. Sufferings that those around her knew not of—induced from a weakened and debilitated frame—were borne unrepiningly and in silence; and every duty, however arduous or distasteful, was *sought* out, and performed with eagerness and avidity. Young as she was in the conventional life, she had yet made such progress in its spirit, that it had been already remarked, “she possessed *no will!*” But longings would not command unqualified *belief*—nor the sternest performance of any duties, *peace of mind*. Still the same round of doubting, fearing, and continual questioning. Ever the same amount of disquiet, and mental unrest. No penance, prayer, or self-reproach, could prevent the recurrence of *the same* tormenting circle of inquiries,

which were destined to be answered only by their own vague echo. Peace was nearer the dwelling of the miserable slave than her poor restless bosom. Religiously she told her state of mind and scruples to her confessor, who, satisfied with the sincerity of his penitent, at first treated them but slightly, and as of little or minor importance : only urging her, when she spoke of difficulty in invoking the blessed virgin, to do so *more* fervently and constantly. This she strictly obeyed, until at length, for one prayer offered to the Saviour, *ten* times the number were presented to his mother according to the flesh ; and the deluded votaress went so far, at times, as to persuade herself that it was *pride* to offer her *own* petitions to the throne of God, when she had so powerful and perfect an advocate to do it for her. Still, still, all would not do. And though all the instructions she received tended to the same effect, and the whole religious practices of the community went to exalt Mary to the very throne of heaven itself, she could not disencumber her mind of the reasonings that *would* come, and old, half-buried ideas, which ever and anon sprang up like a nightmare to oppress it. At length, one day, by a desperate effort, she laid open to her confessor the *entire* state of her feelings ; telling him all her endeavours were in vain, for in despite of everything she had done, or could do, she was utterly unable to feel the devotion to the blessed virgin she wished and sighed for. *His method* of proceeding was worthy of the

nineteenth century, and as worthy of remark, because we are often told such things are not matters of *faith* now-a-days. He gave Isabel a pamphlet to read, containing an account of different miraculous appearances—at several periods of the church's history, to various individuals of both sexes—of the blessed virgin, to establish and propagate a devotion called the Scapular—to the due performance of which a rare treasure of graces and privileges are attached. The thing itself—namely, the Scapular (though, by-the-bye, they are of various kinds) is a square piece, or rather two square pieces of cloth, sewed both together, and worked according to a peculiar pattern—said to have been sewn by the Blessed Virgin herself, and is designed to be worn either around the neck or across the shoulders; upon the wearing of which, and the strict fulfilment of certain other annexed obligations, the wearer receives various spiritual privileges and singular immunities. The exact details are too childish to enter upon here, and they vary also according to what kind of Scapular is bestowed. But one privilege annexed to that given to Isabel was, entire exemption from the flames of purgatory, on the conditions therein specified; and if I mistake not, a promise that she should never be finally lost. The conditions were simple enough: merely to wear it, to fast on a certain day or days, to give alms according to ability; or, otherwise, say certain prayers, &c., if these things were inadmissible.

I blush to write such folly, as Isabel blushed

afterwards to remember it. But it is fit things should appear as they are. I had well-nigh forgotten to say that all these privileges were the special benefactions of the blessed virgin, who, as I named before, had on several distinct occasions descended upon earth, to testify thus her good will and power in her clients' regards. Isabel read, with no comments but the painfully suppressed ones her fettered mind would still make. But she was no whit nearer the goal she sought. She received the Scapular out of a spirit of obedience, without reply, remark, or question—smothering in the depths of her heart, all that rose in opposition, But no miracle followed its reception. No marvel ensued from the munificent donation. The old ideas worked still freely as ever. And others, too, now came often in to aid them: ay, and of a character far, far more painful and difficult of either suppression or control. I mean ideas and feelings of the class stated in my opening chapter, which rent the already lacerated heart as if in sunder. The truth is, the poor girl was far too sincere not to carry out her principles to their very utmost verge, even in the smallest minutiae, and every thought, therefore, of an alien character, was a source of the most harassing self-reproach. Obedience, too, which is the life of all religious institutions, in fact the only element which binds them together, and without which—implicit and unreserved—they could not exist a month, taught her that the sacrifice of her mind and *judgment was even a greater duty, and higher*

source of merit, than that of her will and personal liberty. Each impulse of the mind that wandered beyond prescribed limits, however in accordance with right reason and sound principles, was a license as wrong as dangerous—the parent of sin and error, and as such to be repudiated.

Consequently, a delicate and timorous conscience, where the intellect was not quite bound down with chains of iron, had a continual and most harassing source of mental torture, ever present with it. Each sin, too, must be confessed, and sins of thought no less than those of actual commission, if, at least, they were voluntary. And who, who was to decide this intricate and difficult question?—who say where the evil was voluntary or not? or when in such a state of feeling consent was given or withheld? To approach the holy Eucharist with any known or doubtful sin unconfessed, and unrepented of too, was sacrilege; and this to a sincere Catholic is the climax of horrors; therefore, where the more careless or indifferent would not have troubled themselves about the matter, such a conscience as Isabel's constrained her to search to the very utmost, and examine each one of its remotest ~~derelictions~~, or else for it there was no peace. And oh! what a never-failing *mine* of unrest and disquiet was here unceasingly supplied! They only who have experienced such misery, and seen its effects, can sympathise with, or understand *its unfortunate victim's pangs*. They tell you, *indeed, not to be scrupulous, &c. &c., and pre-*

tend to lay down marks on such points for your guidance. But alas ! it is all in vain ; and to the most *sincere*, the most entirely so. Indeed, this is the practical working of the whole system of Catholicism, as it must be in any system where man is taught that of himself he can merit, and that his works are available to his salvation. I speak advisedly. I know well the ground they take—few perhaps understand it better,* nor how fair it appears in theory, how harsh and galling in practice. Not without the grace of Christ, they say, can man's holiest works avail him anything, but with this grace they are meritorious and efficacious. Yet they teach, that your life must be one continual course of self-denial and sacrifice—that you must by these things *seek to render yourself acceptable* ; that austerities and mortifications are a necessary *means* to the attainment of salvation ; that you must for ever *do*, and work, and suffer ; and after all no *certainty*, no assured ground of faith is afforded by all your efforts. Wherein, indeed, you fail in presenting a perfect sacrifice, the superabundant merits and prayers of the saints may come in to help you—the intercession of the blessed virgin be made a powerful auxiliary, if you earnestly and humbly seek it ; and wherein all these fall short from any want of sustained fervour, or other human frailty, purgatory at the last will step to your rescue, and wash away the lingering stains by its penal and cleansing fires. Oh,

* Witness a little book I myself some time ago penned on the subject: "Clarendon, a Tale of Recent Times."

how different this from the way of simple faith in the all-sufficient efficacy of Christ's atonement: how different, as darkness from light, —the gloom of the grave from the effulgence of heaven. *There*, all is peace, tranquillity, happiness, and joy; there, through grace, is a refuge from all the ills flesh is heir to, and sin the most of all; there is an anchor never-failing, however adverse winds may blow, or infernal malice seek to lure, or yet terrify to perdition; a port in every storm; sunlight in the darkest hour; resource when every other on earth or in heaven fails! and oh, oh, at last, when the tempests and evils of life are ended, a sure haven of eternal rest to receive the weather-beaten voyager, the light of which, even across the blackened and turbid waters of life's latest sea, glimmers stedfastly, and ever with a brightening ray, as the gloom gathers more darkly along their appalling waste! But oh, *here* is no *assured* confidence, no certain refuge for the soul in such a dire extremity! Doing, bearing, suffering all through life, it has yet no unquestionable reliance that the sacrifice has been accepted, or that still some undetected stains remain not, to be purged away by atoning fires. For they tell you, *assurance* is presumption, asserting as a doctrine of Holy Scripture, that "no man knoweth whether he is worthy of love or hatred." Through life working in doubt, death comes in darkness, and clinging in the awful moment to the sincerity of its performance of duties past, to the *exactness* of its life, the *purity* of its confes-

sions, the fervor of its communions, the strictness of its performance of the laws of God and the church, and the efficacy of the priest's absolution, and the last sacraments, instead of to the one pure, perfect, all-satisfying oblation of the sole "Mediator, who taketh away the sins of the world," and who hath appointed faith in Him as the only ground of salvation, the trembling spirit enters upon eternity as upon a drear and unknown region, enveloped in Egyptian gloom.

Oh ! what is man's righteousness at such a moment, who shall wrap himself in it, or presume in its most sullied covering to stand before the Omnipotent ! How the terrified and trembling soul seeks in agony for some unwavering source of trust and peace, for some certain rock on which to venture ; and overwhelmed by the sight of its utter nothingness, helplessness, and defilement, cries out, unless indeed given over to the blindness of presumption, " 'Woe is me' if on my works depend my hopes of justification before my Judge, ' for I am undone.' "

But to return. The too conscientious victim of the system I have been attempting faintly to describe, striving in vain to bind down her intellect and her affections to its despotic sway, and constantly harassed with remorse and self-reproach from her inability to do so, as if driven from every other source, betook herself in her desolation and misery to the One alone able to succour ; and as the darkness increased around her, so the more fervently did she pray.

True, her prayer had but one burden, and often was but a series of repeated ejaculations, all of the same import: "Lord, teach me thy truth!" Often for hours she was on her knees, during the time the community were engaged in other acts of devotion to which she was not yet admitted, would she, tortured beyond endurance by her own thoughts, and incapable of forming any other petition, breathe alone this simple but expressive *one*, while not unfrequently floods of tears would gush from her eyes, its only herald on its pathway to the throne of God.

She was for ever working, yet bore no fruit; for ever combating her earthly affections, yet they reigned supreme; for ever seeking to control her passions, yet they mocked incessantly each attempt; denying herself all that bore the least semblance of evil, and seeking ardently after holiness of heart before God, yet feeling even the more impure, unholy, and defiled. Debarring herself of all that renders being desirable, yet having no shadow of recompense within her own bosom; sacrificing her will, her intellect, her personal freedom, living in the worst of all servitudes, in order to obtain the spiritual liberty after which she pined, yet still it diligently eluded her search. Seeking rest, but finding it not—a substance, and grasping but the shadow. Oh, it was sad and bitter experience! Her frame, never robust, threatened to give way before the round of observances she imposed upon herself, and the *conflicts of mind* she constantly underwent. And

she welcomed, ah ! exultingly welcomed, the thoughts of death, to free her from the life which was becoming a burden too heavy to be borne. For, so at least she *then* thought, after all she had *done* and *suffered*, there *must* be *some* hopes of heaven in her case. O ! strange delusion ! pitiable self-deceiving ! This, *this*, is not what God requires at his creatures' hands—nay more, it is hateful and abominable in his sight ; for has he not declared that without him we can do nothing ? And yet is not Isabel's case that of thousands at this moment ? The too sincere and credulous dupes of a system of human invention, which, teaching man to lose sight of the all-perfect righteousness of Christ, directs him to go about to establish his own, and leads him on, in proportion to his ardour and his zeal, under a yoke of self-denial and austerity the most cruel and unnatural—which each day becomes more arbitrary and exacting, as it is uncomplainingly borne—until he finds at last, either that man, not God, hath instituted these things—and then happy and blessed is his case—or else, in despair, he sinks beneath his intolerable burden, and, involved in the vortex of unbelief, throws all faith to the winds, and makes shipwreck of all his hopes of heaven ; or yet, perhaps, worse than all, becoming in time proud and self-deceived, sinks down into a complacent formalist, placing his trust in his idols, and erecting them into a Saviour. Oh, woe to such a soul, for it is already in the slumber of death ! and unless a miracle snatch it from destruction

even at the eleventh hour, it will infallibly be lost, and lost for ever. But neither of the two latter cases was destined to be Isabel's, though before the hour of redemption came, gradually drawing nigh as it was, she had yet a fresh world of experience and sorrow to undergo. From the night of her sudden indisposition, she had never effectually rallied, and though for the ensuing few days she veiled much of what she suffered, and endeavoured to assume cheerfulness, she could not conceal from herself that something unusual was at work within her. Concealment, indeed, soon became impossible, for her countenance alone told a sufficient tale ; and though her fervor would fain have prompted her not to yield until literally compelled to do so, yet her superiors soon, wisely, absolutely forbade her to proceed further than they thought advisable ; and the invalid was consigned to the infirmary, there to be nursed and tended until convalescence became apparent. But the disease was most of the mind, and no regimen of nurse, or prescription of physician, could reach that. Indeed, the remedies employed were of a nature absolutely to increase the evil, and this they in fact did to an alarming extent. A prey to wasting thought, and its consequent unnerving feverishness and excitement, she needed air, and change, and cheerful society, and every aid to win her from its influence, and if possible to brace the enervated system, and bring it to a more healthy tone. But instead of this, *she was confined in a dark close room, kept*

or the most part to her bed, and debarred like from atmospheric influence and aught that could recreate, or bring change of a pleasing character.*

The physician, too, mistook altogether the character of her ailment, and ignorantly pronounced it to be a cold caught on the voyage, which had been lingering about her ever since—and so proceeded at once to employ the active remedies of blistering and leeching, which were calculated to reduce her, under present circumstances, to the lowest state of physical prostration; and this, indeed, they quietly did. Without a murmur, however, or even remontrance, Isabel submitted, though her own knowledge told her what an egregious blunder was being committed; and she also felt who must pay the penalty. But obedience was a

* The writer wishes it here to be distinctly understood that there is no complaint of unkind treatment intended, or design to cast the slightest reproach on any one connected with the convent. On the contrary, the utmost good-will was experienced from all, and as far as was consistent with their rules, and ideas of what was good and beneficial, consideration and indulgence also. All she wishes to show is, the subserviency and bondage to which their arbitrary principle of unqualified obedience exposes its victims. For example: one evening, a *religieuse* came to the infirmary, complaining of suffering much from a disease to which she was subject, and saying that the Rev. Mother *would* oblige her to take something that disagreed with her, under the impression that it did her good, when she knew from painful experience that it aggravated her symptoms. In fact, before her entrance into the convent, her family physician had told her that it was very improper for her. On being advised to represent the case to the Rev. Mother, she replied, that she had done so, but to no purpose; and actually seemed to glory (though it appeared a little at variance with her complaints) in suffering through obedience.

merit, and the more blind and passive, the greater too ; and she was too glad of seizing any occasion that offered of adding to her poor and slender stock. Besides, even if she died—and in her terribly reduced condition she thought it possible—she should die the victim of obedience, and what lot more blessed, more secure? So she did, and permitted and suffered whatever was required, as unresistingly as an infant, even though she felt, on more than one occasion, that a little more might bring her, if not to the verge of death, to that of madness. But now came the trial. The devotions she had been accustomed to practise became utterly beyond her strength, and even the attempt to perform them mechanically was the occasion of much and keen suffering. This state of things grew worse as her strength decreased, and, driven to the verge of despair, she turned in every direction for the comfort she could nowhere find. Accustomed to place confidence in, and find a source of peace in the fervor with which she performed her religious obligations, and in the length and number of her prayers, she felt now that she was unable to attend to even a small part, and that not properly, as though all was gone, and she had lost the only means of obtaining grace at the hands of her Creator. And constantly aiming still to go through the accustomed course—as though by such a senseless and blind proceeding she could propitiate God—she kept up *such a constant strain on the nervous system, that, had it continued long, she must have be-*

come the most pitiable wreck, if she had not undermined the springs of her intellect. And at this juncture, perhaps, it will be well to give you an outline of the religious requirements and obligations of the order into which Isabel sought to be admitted ; all of which, as far as she had been able, she had endeavoured to follow to the letter. And then, oh ! then judge ye, whether these things be of God, or whether, indeed, that Scripture is not verified : " In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." I will commence and go through with the day's proceedings, from the hour of rising to that of retiring, and show you that at least the conventional life is not always one of ease and sloth. And here let me remark, that I am actuated by no unworthy or invidious feelings in doing this, or in any comments I may make. On the contrary, from the very bottom of my heart I pity the suffering votaries of a system so revolting and austere. But while I sympathise with and esteem *them* sincerely, I cannot do otherwise than reprehend, and hold up to the stigma it merits, the despotism which so deludes, degrades, and holds them captive. Too virtuous and ready slaves of a harsh and cruel task-master, they pass their days, and wear out their lives, in a service alike repugnant to religion, reason, and nature ; ensnared and deceived on every hand, pleasing not God in this world, nor, it is to be feared in too many instances, with much well-grounded hope of reward hereafter. But again we are digressing, and to re-

turn.* The toilsome day commences thus:— At half-past four o'clock, summer and winter, the sisterhood are summoned from their slumbers, half an hour being allowed for the purposes of rising and the toilette. At five, they all meet in the chapel, and pass the first half hour in meditation, which they pursue in silence, with the exception, that the chief points of the subject—which is always a selected one—are read aloud at intervals, for each one to follow and dilate on in her own mind, according to her imagination or inclination. The appointed time over, it is intimated by a signal from the Superiorress, after which they immediately commence aloud the repetition of their morning office, which is an appointed number of Psalms and passages of Holy Writ in Latin, according to the season of the ecclesiastical year. This occupies generally from twenty minutes to half an hour, and at its conclusion they either leave the chapel, to go about some employment, or remain in it, to meditate still longer, as the case may be, until half-past six, at which time they all again assemble for mass. This takes up generally about five and thirty minutes, or from that to three-quarters of an hour; and at its conclusion the Superiorress says aloud some part or parts of the rosary, the sisters responding to the appointed portions. At half-past seven the bell rings, and they quit the chapel for the refectory. This was a long, plain room, without

* It should be premised, that this Order is called the Third of St. Francis.

attempt at relief or adornment of any kind, excepting a large image of the blessed Virgin, holding the infant Jesus in her arms, which is elevated against the whitewashed wall, on one side, and another of the patron Saint of the Order similarly stationed on the opposite side, to correspond with it. Three long deal tables, stretching well nigh from the top to the bottom of the room, and leaving only space for one smaller one at the top, for the two Mother Superioresses, and two novice mistresses, with forms running each side of them, after the manner of large seminaries, complete the furniture. Here the community sit down in silence to their frugal breakfast. Coffee, or tea, without sugar — generally the former — and brown bread and butter, usually compose the meal, excepting on fasting mornings — and these come not few or far between — when a cup of coffee alone suffices until dinner time. The breakfast concluded, they each proceed to their different avocations, some to work, others to tend the sick, of which there are often some within the convent, others to teach the poor school, others to the household work — to wash, iron, sew, &c., until twelve o'clock, when the angelus bell rings. This summons all, in whatever part of the house or grounds they may be, to join in saying the "Angelus Domini," which is the angelic salutation to the blessed Virgin, followed by her reply to the heavenly messenger, &c., and each part concluded by the angel's words: "Hail, Mary, full of grace! blessed art thou amongst women, &c.," finished

by an invocation thus expressed : " Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death." Immediately upon this, the dinner bell sounds, when once again in silence they all meet. A long grace, consisting of a psalm, and two or three other selections, all in Latin, precede the meal, which is as frugal in its kind as the breakfast. It is a rule of the Order to eat flesh meat but three days in the week—Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays ; consequently, dinner is nothing more than soup-maigre, composed of vegetables and rice, followed by vegetables and rice cooked separately, with occasionally, but by no means often, a small quantity of fish or eggs. I have before named the rule of reading observed during dinner ; but I forgot to mention that one or another of the sisters is generally called out, just as she has commenced hers, to act as reader for the rest. As soon as it is finished, at a signal given, they all rise, and commence reciting a psalm aloud, proceeding, as they do so, towards the chapel, where they kneel down, and repeat several prayers, all still in Latin, and a thanksgiving. Then comes the hour of recreation—or rather the half-hour, for it rarely exceeds that time—and they all walk in the garden, or otherwise follow their inclination. The time speeds rapidly on, and again the tone of the bell calls them to the chapel, for their mid-day office. Another half-hour is thus consumed, and they resume their different occupations, until the hour of four, *when they again meet in the refectory, to par-*

take of a cup of coffee. After this, which does not occupy more than ten minutes, they again pursue their allotted tasks till a quarter to six, when they commence their evening office—the one at which they were engaged when I introduced Isabel to the reader. This occupies much longer than either of the foregoing ones, being rarely over before half-past seven, and sometimes later. Then comes supper, which is again, for the most part, taken in silence ; and immediately upon that, evening meditations, and the rosary, which together take up the time until an indefinite period after nine o'clock, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, —and from the chapel they proceed quietly to bed.

Thus closes a day as wearisome from its monotony, as it is, and must be, useless to the individual. I had forgotten to say, that on certain occasions, as during Lent and Advent, the month of May—dedicated to Mary—the prayers and other observances are increased to a considerable extent, while the fasting, at the two former seasons, is rigorous in the extreme. The whole of Lent, a period of nearly six weeks, and again during the same time near Advent—which they protract to the same length as Lent—they fast strictly, Sundays excepted—not taking any other refreshment, until twelve o'clock in the day, but a cup of coffee, though rising at half-past four, and being actively engaged the whole period. Other means of mortification, and numerous devotions there are, too minute and tedious to particularise here ; but I may say, in passing,

that it required not only an amount of sustained fervour beyond what falls to the lot of most mortals, but a frame possessed of much strength and power of endurance, long to sustain such a mode of existence. None of these things, however, had daunted Isabel ; and she knew most of them, from a three weeks' residence in a convent in England, before going abroad. Nor yet did the hardships and trials of the novitiate terrify her ; and they were numerous indeed. Panting after perfection, she hailed everything that promised to lead to it ; and *this* she was assured was the grand highway. Whatever mortified and galled the flesh, or was in any shape an instrument of its humiliation, she was taught to believe was a source of great merit ; and otherwise having, ever since she had been capable of reflection, accustomed herself more or less to habits of self-denial, it was now less difficult. Even the subjugation of the will was at times easy and indifferent to her ; or if she felt it hard on particular occasions, when called upon for a great sacrifice, she rather rejoiced at the opportunity afforded her for practising self-renunciation. Thus, with a ready heart and fervent spirit, she had entered upon the life she had embraced ; and by the mere strength of her will, and might of her enthusiasm, had urged her way through obstacles within and without, and prosecuted her arduous career until it had brought her to the point of physical weakness and mental prostration we have described. *Her sickness increasing, from the inappropriate-*

ness of the remedies employed, and the constant demand she made on her enervated powers, she was unable at length to concentrate her attention at all to any serious subject, and floods of tears she could not control were the only relief to her over-wrought mind. Her superiors mistaking these for proofs of unhappiness or discontent, harassed her continually with questions and solicitations in some shape or other; and the poor girl, in a state of feeling she could not describe, and which she had neither strength nor courage to do if she could, had this trial added also to her manifold sources of suffering, that they deemed her reserved and unconfiding; and to a nature like hers there could not well be a deeper pang. "Well, are you now content? are you more satisfied with your state?" were questions which were continually distressing her whenever her superioresses visited her couch; and the usual conclusion was—"Would you like to see your confessor?" And, oh, Isabel, what a weight of trouble and perplexity was involved in a favourable response to the last query! A conscience burdened—she knew not why; a myriad sources of self-reproach in her infirmity; every unavoidable dereliction of duty haunting her timorous conscience; each thought and feeling of impatience, however provoked, or momentary; all her overwhelming weight of condemnation, arising from her doubts as to faith, and the undying remembrance and love of her friends and kindred, which she could not shake off or lessen; the impossibility in her

condition of remembering all she ought, or, from weakness and agitation, entering upon it, if she could, with the dread of committing a sacrilege, in case of any untoward omission : all this drove her almost to the verge of distraction at the thought, and again floods of tears—deepening the wrong impression on her superioresSES' minds—were the sole reply they obtained to the question.

At length, one evening, when Isabel was at the worst, intelligence was brought that her confessor had arrived, and she must prepare for confession within the hour. As he was an Englishman, and came from a distance specially to hear her in her own tongue, there was no appeal from the mandate ; and fearful and agitated beyond expression, she endeavoured to collect her thoughts to obey. But it was all in vain. Every effort she made left them but in greater confusion, and utterly beyond her own control. She could remember nothing distinctly or separately ; and yet her manifold failings, and causes of self-condemnation, weighed her down to the earth. In this state of mind, all trepidation and confusion, the priest was ushered in. And—“ O, God forgive me if I commit sacrilege, for it is not, *cannot* be my fault ! ” rose to her lips as he entered. Once commenced, the agitation passed, and a feeling of stupor and bewilderment usurped its place—under the influence of which Isabel made her imperfect confession. The absolution was given, and the priest departed ; and then came—an eager crowd—all

her omissions and delinquencies thronging into her memory. She was in despair, and could neither pray nor compose her mind. She knew, to refuse communion immediately after confession, and in her circumstances too, would have a singular look, if not lay her open to unpleasing suspicions. And yet she dared not think of it. Oh! what an adamantine fetter is this dread of sacrilege to a timid and scrupulous soul! She was visited but once again that night, and that was by Mother Cecile, to ask the tormenting question—"If *now* she was more content?" and to tell her to prepare for communion at six o'clock the following morning. With an uncertainty and hesitation of manner anything but satisfactory to the worthy Mother, she replied to the query—"Yes—no," and to the intimation concerning communion, merely signified assent by a gesture. No repose had Isabel that night. "Tired nature's sweet restorer," refused even for one short moment to visit her; and until long after daylight dawned, she remained wildly tossing about in feverish restlessness—a prey to fears and imaginations the most distressing. She tried again and again to pray; but the effort was totally in vain, and the hurried action of her heart became so alarming as to warn her to desist. In this state she formed the desperate resolution to *think no more*—while an inward voice seemed to whisper—"Trust it *all* with God." Blindly, as it seemed, she endeavoured to do so, or rather—by the determination to banish the idea—*negatively* did so;

and becoming thus a little more composed, soon after the clock struck five, fell into a short slumber. Scarcely, however, had her senses and sorrows sunk into oblivion, before a noise in the room aroused her again, and she became aware that they were preparing the little altar within it for the reception of the blessed sacrament. Half dead with fatigue and want of rest, a prey to overpowering weakness of body and distress of mind—with all her sources of disquiet thronging fresh upon her—from mere nervous excitement, arising from being thus cruelly disturbed, she mechanically suffered herself to be raised in bed, as they came to change her attire and arrange its covering—closing, and resolutely pressing her eyelids together to keep back the tears that would force themselves. As she did so, and tried to her utmost to feel patient, the thought again flashed through her mind like lightning, with a force she could not resist—“Can God require such sacrifices as these? and if so, is He indeed a God of love?” Devotion was out of the question—to pray was impossible—to receive profit, or be sensible of anything else but overwhelming suffering, was an absurdity to dream of; and to struggle to suppress the thoughts that discomposed and distressed her, and which were the only ideas at that moment prevailing in her mind, was a task entirely hopeless. So she again abandoned herself to *negative disclaimance*, and wept on in silence. Soon the ringing of bells proclaimed the *approach* of the blessed sacrament; and with

one mute but agonised appeal of the heart to God, she received into her mouth what she believed to be His sacred body—to be a subject of reproach for many an after hour—ay, even until the same God worked her deliverance. Despite her wearied body, and imperative need of repose, she continued attempting to repeat forms of prayer for the next hour, even though she could not fix her thoughts two moments consecutively to the task. As though God could be propitiated by such heathenish self-punishment—which must, in fact, inasmuch as it insults his mercy and wrongs his goodness, be hateful to him.

A short slumber succeeded, which brought temporary relief. But, oh! when again the mind resumed its full empire over the body, then came the torture and disquiet. How every subject of self-accusation forgotten at the moment of confession, and those, alas! too recently added in her indevotion and questionings on matters of faith, crowded upon her recollection with sternest force, to overwhelm and plunge her into despair.

In this state of mind she continued the whole day, and, with little intermission, the two next ensuing. On the evening of the third, however, just as she was beginning to feel more consoled, from having persuaded herself that her perplexity and unrest were only another cross permitted for her sanctification, and that her doubts as to faith were the “fiery darts of the wicked one,” two or three of the sisters were talking in her room—and the sub-

ject turned on penance and mortification, each one blaming, or affecting to blame herself, for doing so little. "Oh!" exclaimed one, "do you remember Father —?" calling him by his name; "he was the model of penance. I never met with one like him."

"Yes, perfectly," said a second; "he will be canonized, I should think, if he goes on as he has begun. He is a saint already."

"Father —, did you say?" inquired Isabel, for the name was English, and she had known a *religieux* who bore it. "What of him?"

"Do you know him?" asked the first speaker.

"Yes! if it is the same: a tall, thin young man, and very devout. But you were speaking of his penance. Tell me, what does he do?"

"You know," responded the sister, "he passed a night here on his way to England, a year or two ago?"

"I have heard so."

"Well, do you know, that in the morning, the room in which he slept was a perfect sight to be seen; the floor and walls were completely besprinkled with his blood."

"How so?" asked Isabel—a cold shiver involuntarily creeping through her frame.

"He had been using the discipline, I suppose. But, however, there it was—*his* blood drawn by some instrument of penance or other: and I shall never forget it!"

"Impossible!" said Isabel sadly, scarcely knowing what she said; for again the fearful

question had darted through her mind like inspiration—"Can a God of love require this?"

"Oh, but it is not," said the garrulous sister eagerly; "I was in charge of the stranger's room at the time, and I called numbers to see it beside myself. Did I not, Sister Angelique?"

"Yes, it is perfectly true," said the individual addressed; "— is a great saint for one so young."

Isabel answered not—a strange sickness seized her; and turning away her face to the wall, she busied herself with endeavouring to find an answer to her rushing thoughts—in vain.

CHAPTER III.

"And is this weight of anguish, which they bind
On life, this searing to the quick of mind,
That but to God its own free path would crave,
This crushing out of hope, and love, and youth,
Thy will indeed ? Give light ! that I may know the truth."

BUT still the yoke was on the neck of the captive, pressing her down heavily, heavily, heavily,—more so than ever. Each fresh suggestion or reflection that seemed of a character tending towards emancipation, however remote, was but a new subject of after self-reproach, accusation, and uneasiness, and only more firmly fixed the fetters on her manacled and enslaved soul. Each doubt, each fear, each question, was now noted down, if possible, on the *instant*, that it might not escape the treacherous memory, as matter for confession, and so threatened to be made a fruitful source—instead of working to any good—of placing her under more unlimited subjection, and holding her in more complete bondage. Oh, she was cruelly sincere, strangely unrelenting to herself; and apparently determinately resolved, if possible, to prevent the loving-kindness and mercy of God from taking effect in her regard. How *hard she worked to defeat his gracious purposes*

—how assiduously endeavoured to turn aside, or wrest against himself, his manifest tokens of pity and compassion—how earnestly and zealously assisted Satan in his determination to yoke her inalienably to the triumphal wheels of his chariot! Had she, of foreknowledge and deliberate will, set about to accomplish all this, by the means most likely to be successful, she could not have made a more judicious and promising selection. She was indeed, without knowing it, his bond-slave and handmaiden, and seemingly was desirous of continuing so for ever. But “God’s thoughts are not as our thoughts,”—praised be his name! and his loving-kindness who shall tell, or his tender mercy to such as fear him? And *this* Isabel did, assuredly, if nought else. “Like as a father pitieth his children,” so he pities such: for He has himself declared it, and “His word abideth for ever.” Oh, strangely He works, and truly are his ways a “mighty deep!” Permitting men to wander in labyrinths, to be lost in mazes of doubt, darkness, and despair, only that He may more clearly work out the designs of His compassion, and teach them what alone, under such circumstances, they can ever so effectually learn—the royal road to peace—that man is *nothing*, and God is *all*. Oh, hard lesson, and yet how easy! Oh, last conviction to which the proud spirit submits—and yet here begins its true greatness. Like the fugitive hunted from refuge to refuge in his own land, yet still clinging to the soil dear to *nature*, though every one by turns renounces and casts him off, until

at length he is obliged, in despair, as a last resource, to fly to the foster-clime where justice cannot reach him, and there finds at once repose, and peace, and ease—so is the soul that seeks by human means and its own performances to sanctify and save itself. It cannot be. In the whole range of creation is found no plan by which a man can be made just before his Maker, and ensure lasting favour, but that of *substituted righteousness*, which he receives just at the moment he despairs of his own and all mortal succour; and is enabled to cast his soul, as a thing *utterly guilty, lost, and hopeless*, upon that blood which atones, saves, and cleanses from all sin. But against this simple, and safe, and efficacious way, proud man—his own worst enemy—fights, and fights to the last. Aiming after what he can never achieve by his own efforts, he refuses, in his mad folly, to accept it as a free gift; and preferring still his own ways, finds out a thousand ingenious methods of tormenting himself and rendering life a misery: flying still, as one refuge after another fails, to some ever fresh and vain one, until, unless God in mercy arrests and shows him the way of salvation, the last stronghold fails at length, only to whirl him into the gulf of destruction. And this spirit of self-sanctification is seen in its fullest development in the conventional life, of which, indeed, it is the very basis and groundwork. The whole system is a constant struggle of *human* effort to accomplish *God's* work alone. *Convinced of sin, and desirous of salvation,*

its votaries yet refuse the only proffered and efficacious aid, flying to a thousand empirical and quack resources, and putting themselves to inconceivable and nameless torture, before they will embrace the genuine tender of the only true Physician. And poor Isabel seemed obstinately resolved to pursue this course to the utmost. Deliverance, however, was at hand, when it appeared most hopeless, and out of her own perversity did her Almighty Father design to work it out. After the incident mentioned in the last chapter, she had a violent struggle with herself, in which she strove hard to extinguish the ray of light which had for the moment dawned across her benighted soul. This she partially effected, and darkness more opaque and dense was the consequence. The crime she had committed in yielding to such suggestions at all, hung heavily on her conscience, which, becoming more exacting, conjured up, from the model of austerity she had had placed before her, a vivid and accusing contrast to her own derelictions, and want of fervour. How little had she hitherto done, in comparison with him who had, in her humble opinion of herself, so much fewer causes of regret and remorse than she had. Truly she had been all her life sleeping, and it was time to awake out of slumber. And even what little she had effected—how many thoughts of pride and self-complacency had sullied it, and, at other times, how many of impatience and repining! Each sacrifice had been too great, *each cross too heavy, however trifling, and, oh!*

worse than all! she had listened to reasonings as to their efficacy—had presumed to doubt whether penance was necessary, and whether, indeed, God required it—had even yielded to suggestions reflecting on his mercy if it were so; and by all this cast a question on the authority and infallibility of His church. What a sinner she had been, and how much room was there for penance now! But, poor girl, she could do *none*. In the midst of all this need she was utterly powerless to attempt even the slightest act of mortification. Prostrate in body and mind, weak as an infant, she could only lie on her uneasy pallet and listen in silence to her own accusing and wretched thoughts. All mental energy was gone, and she was the slave of her imagination, entirely unable to combat or repudiate its phantasms, of whatever character.

At this juncture she found particular pleasure in the society of one of the sisters, who appeared to be equally pleased with hers. Accomplished, possessing a fine mind as well as beautiful person, ardent in feeling, and warm in heart and affections, she had, almost from the first moment of Isabel's entrance into the convent, appeared to take a peculiar interest in her; which, with all the fervour of strong sympathies denied any other legitimate vent, Isabel richly reciprocated. A shade of melancholy, too, which sat on her face, and deep traces of thought and suffering which in more than one *unguarded* moment Isabel had perceived, added a *vague* feeling of compassion to the other emo-

tions she experienced in her regard. There was something so perfect in her beauty, so delicate in her form, so touching at all times in her look and manner, and she seemed, from some cause or other, so warmly attached to Isabel, that the latter soon loved her as a sister, and they talked constantly to each other of their mutual feelings, hopes, and fears. Though looking barely, even in the effectual disguise of her habit, more than five or six and twenty, she had yet been in the convent twelve years, having entered it from the school at which she had been a *pensionnaire*. From one of the sisters, whom she questioned on the subject, she learned that Sister Euphrasia, for so I shall call her, had been a lady in the world, that she had brought a portion to the convent, and that her parents were dead. With this knowledge, aided by her love, it went to Isabel's heart to see her performing frequently offices about the house, that belonged to a common menial: and she would sometimes, as she glanced at the white and delicate hands, playfully rally her on their inappropriateness to such occupation. On such occasions it was melting to see the sweet look of patient resignation that overspread her beautiful features. "Oh, that is nothing! how trifling is all we can do on earth to ensure eternal salvation! I have been a *religieuse* long, but I have made yet little progress towards its accomplishment."

"Well! but, Sister Euphrasia, you have made every sacrifice a mortal can, and have

lived edifyingly up to your rule. What more would you do? If *you* reproach yourself, where am *I*?"

"Oh, you suffer!" she would calmly rejoin, "but I have done nothing."

"God help *me* then!" rejoined Isabel, deeply moved, and for a long time there was silence. A deep sigh, so loud as to echo through the room, broke it, and quickly turning her head, Isabel exclaimed in accents of keen emotion, "Dear, dear Euphrasia! what *is* the matter? Oh! do, do tell me." The sister came towards her, and bent down her head and kissed her, while she answered in a low tone,—"I was thinking of you."

"What, what of me? why should I cause you to sigh thus?"

"Because," she answered evasively, "you have come from such a distance, and now you are ill."

"Sister Euphrasia, that is not true; that is not *all*," replied Isabel, with much feeling; "something distresses you besides that, I am confident. Oh! I implore you, tell me!"

A dreadful idea shot through her mind, that the poor sufferer was not happy in her vocation, and all the horrors of such a supposition, made more vivid by her imagination, crowded distressingly upon her.

The sister put her arms round her questioner's neck, and Isabel saw that her eyes were full of tears, "That is all, my darling," she replied earnestly, "I have no other cause of grief, believe me."

"Tell, oh tell me, are you happy?" pursued Isabel, now fairly weeping; "I know there is something wrong." Euphrasia rose, her sweet face becoming calm on the instant, and her eyes glistening through the moisture which suffused them. There was, however, a pallor on her cheek, and pathos in her voice, which went to the girl's heart, as she answered in deep and tremulous tones, "A *religieuse* is ever happy."

Isabel said no more, for the manner of her companion forbade it. But another source of questioning was awakened in her mind, which for the moment overset all her resolve and dispelled every thought of peace,—and questioning of the most painful kind; to be followed, as usual, by self-reproach and remorse of the most painful kind also.

From that time she watched Euphrasia with all the love and devotion of a tender sister. When present with her, no emotion or expression of any kind, however evanescent, escaped her affectionate observation. If she had loved her well before, she did so now with an abandonment that knew no reserve or limits; and the sister, on her part, seemed to feel an equal increase of affection. Only on one occasion, however, did she again perceive any traces of what had so much disquieted her; and that was once, when, having feigned sleep, she suddenly opened her eyes unperceived, and caught an expression of the same careworn and haggard character that had so much interested and *pained* her. She took no notice, however, lest

it should distress or annoy her ; and as Euphrasia seemed to feel much consolation, and appeared more cheerful in her society, she had no excuse for pursuing her investigation as she would have liked to do.

About a week after this time, they had been sitting, talking in the usual tone of confidence about crosses and sufferings, and Euphrasia had dwelt particularly on the continual *sacrifice* a *religieuse* was called upon to make. Taking from her office-book a little picture, on which was engraved many multiplied emblems of the cross, she was explaining its symbolical meaning to Isabel, and dwelling hopefully on the chances of every one getting to heaven but herself: but she—she said—had *done* too little to hope for it, without a long, long purgatory.

It was a beautiful Sabbath evening, and the rays of the setting sun streamed into the dark little room, a thing of almost unusual occurrence ; but they lighted up the sweet countenance of the speaker, making it look beyond expression lovely,—chastened and subdued as it was. Isabel gazed, rapt in admiration and sympathy, until at last it became so intense as to prevent her doing so longer, for her eyes grew suffused.

The sister, however, noticed it not, and at that moment news was brought that *Monseigneur* the Bishop had arrived.

“Indeed ! what can be his errand, I wonder ?” said Isabel, smiling ; “I should like to see him.”

“Oh, he is often here,” responded Euphrasia ; “*you will not long want the opportunity when you get better.*”

Shortly after, Euphrasia left to join the sisters in choir, and Isabel saw no more of her until night had quite closed in and the hour for repose was fast drawing on. It came, and passed, and the house grew silent, telling that the labours of the day were ended. And having waited long in expectation of the accustomed "Good night," which had never yet been omitted, Isabel at length gave up the hope in despair; and rather wondering what could be the occasion, tried to compose herself to sleep. She was near succeeding, and had just glided into that half-dreaming consciousness, the precursor of slumber, when the soft opening of the door aroused her—and bearing in her hand a shaded lantern, Euphrasia stood before her. The light of the taper within it, which emanated only from one side, fell full on her countenance, and Isabel saw at once that something distressing had occurred. Every shade of the usual soft colour had gone from her cheek, her lip quivered, and there was feverish excitement in her eye and manner, which struck Isabel painfully. She advanced and stood before her, but seemed afraid to trust herself to speak. But as she met the inquiring gaze fixed upon her, for Isabel was too startled and apprehensive for the moment to hazard a direct question, she hurriedly exclaimed, in a voice that strove in vain to be steady, "I leave to-morrow."

"Leave to-morrow!" said Isabel, mechanically reiterating her words, doubtful whether she heard aright.

"Yes, go away—go away on a mission."

"On a mission—where? Good heavens, Euphrasia!" cried Isabel, "you astound me."

"It does not surprise you more than me," she replied, while the tears gushed from her eyes. "Ah! if I had known what awaited me when I was talking of crosses just now, I should not have done it so gaily."

The word *gaiety*, in connection with *her*, smote on Isabel's ear. But she only inquired, with a manner as firm as she could assume, in order not to increase her companion's emotion, "But how comes this? why is it? and where are you going?"

"To _____," she replied, naming a place some fifty English miles distant, where the Order had a house. "I am going to assist in establishing the school, and have only heard it within this hour."

"And you positively leave to-morrow?"

"To-morrow morning at six o'clock."

"Why so soon? you will have no time to say 'good-bye' to any one."

"I do not know. All I am made acquainted with is, that I must go then, and Rev. Mother will not allow me to say farewell to the community."

"And are you willing, dear Euphrasia? Is it not a great trial to be thus hurried away?" asked Isabel, gazing sadly at her still sadder countenance.

"I like it not—I like it not," was all the response she made. But her tears and sobs *now gave a far more eloquent one than any words.*

"My sweet Euphrasia, do not go, then," said poor Isabel, her own grief now overmastering all control, and forgetting at the moment the futility of what she was saying.

"I must, I must, my love! but I own the trial would be less if I had never known *you*."

"Oh, do not say so! do not say so!" painfully replied Isabel; "would that I had never come, to add one pang to your distress!"

"I love you more—more than any words can tell," she replied, tenderly embracing her; "from the first moment I saw you, your compassionate face sympathised with me, and told me you understood my heart."

"And now we must part," sighed Isabel; "it is indeed a trial. Is there no possibility of evading it?"

"None! We shall meet again, if not here, at least in heaven."

"I hope, I trust, I pray so! But, dear Euphrasia, I implore you, think not of me, forget me, forget that such a being ever existed, and be happy!"

Lingeringly, and with ineffable sorrow in her face, the poor girl looked at the speaker; and the only reply that came at last was, "I could, if I had never known you."

"Do not! do not! I implore you: 'tis God's will, as you told me a few hours ago."

"It is, it is! I am resigned. I am not murmuring. Trials constitute the life of a *religieuse*."

They *do* indeed, thought Isabel. For though she had witnessed and experienced a few, this

was the heaviest. As Euphrasia uttered the last words—"trials constitute the life of a *religieuse*," there was that in her manner that went to Isabel's heart, and looking wistfully in her touching face, she said with much agitation, "One, one question before we part, dear Euphrasia: my sister, more than sister, are you—are you happy?"

Again the same inscrutable expression which, on the proposal of the like question on a former occasion, had passed over her face, followed by precisely the same vague and meaningless reply, "*A religieuse* is ever happy."

"I hope so, I hope so! O God, I trust so!" indistinctly murmured Isabel, while a prayer rose to God for her from the inmost depths of her heart.

"But I must go," said Euphrasia. "If it were known I was here at this hour I should incur reproof. Take this small picture"—offering her the very one she had been commenting on in the early part of the evening—"and pray for me. I will come in again for a few moments before I leave in the morning."

"I *will* pray for you always, constantly, every day of my life," eagerly promised Isabel; "you pray for me also."

"My sweet girl, I will. And now, farewell!"

Once more she embraced her, tried to smile, failed in the attempt, and turned away in tears.

"Euphrasia!" exclaimed Isabel. But she was gone. Oh, what bitter tears Isabel shed when left alone! What a fountain of distress was opened! What a flood-gate of vague and

anxious feelings, incapable of reply or solution, was afresh let loose ! Was this the life she coveted ? Was it designed by heaven thus to tear asunder rudely and relentlessly all most pure and holy affections, and make man a mere puppet, an automaton, in the hands and at the will of his fellows ? And if so, could she, *dare* she, doom herself to such a cold and cruel fate ? All human emotions, elevated feeling, sense of charity and right, loudly answered, "No !" She had contemplated every possible form of trial, calculated every probable contingency of suffering often before, ay, and in *this* shape too ; but it had never, until now, struck *home*. The reality was sterner than the ideal, and her heart bled beneath its power. Once more the sport of the winds and waves which had so often lately buffeted her, but now more completely at their mercy than ever, she lay an unresisting and trembling prey to their overwhelming force—seeking in vain a haven into which to steer her shattered bark for security and rest. It was indeed a tempestuous war of the elements, and no guiding star appeared as a harbinger of hope. But above, far, far above all, was One who was in truth at the helm, though invisible, and who, reducing all things unto subserviency to His omnipotent power, was, through the raging billows and palpable darkness, gently but surely, with invincible might, guiding the frail and agitated vessel to Divine anchorage—whence her moorings would never more be unfixed, nor the fierce hurricane thus assail, to the day of eternity.

THE SEQUEL.

“There are swift hours in life, strong, rushing hours,
That do the work of tempests in their might;
They shake down things that stood as rocks and towers,
Unto the undoubting mind.”

FOR one moment more on the ensuing morning did Isabel embrace her friend, and then saw her no more. She was gone like a dream, and no trace or record remained of their intercourse but the memory of what once had been. “And thus ever perish all my earthly attachments, and thus *must* they henceforth ever perish,” she sighed; “love, human love, is not for me. And yet I have a heart how capable of loving! But this is wrong: ‘tis better so. I should but love too well, and so make idols. My affections have even now, all through life, been my bane. From this time forth for evermore my God shall be all in all. Yes! begone earthly ties, begone passion’s allurements, begone lover, friends, and kindred! with ‘*the* strength of my will I renounce you all—for behold the God of Hosts is the God of my heart, and my portion for ever. Thrice blessed am I to lose all to find Him!”

“I will have mercy and not sacrifice,” whispered a “still, small voice,” “Mercy is my delight. The affections of nature are my

own gift, are emanations from myself. Thou canst not destroy what I have implanted within thee. Love me with thy 'whole heart,' but also, 'thy neighbour as thyself.'

Isabel fell into a train of musing, of a very melancholy and sombre cast, ending like all the rest in doubts and fears and difficulties. Soon, however, complete exhaustion oppressed all her faculties like paralysis, and terminated her reverie. The emotions of the last few hours, while they had given a false impetus, which had borne her up above herself for the time being, had been succeeded by a corresponding prostration, which almost deprived her of the power of thought or volition. She lay in a stupor, from which she was only aroused by her confessor's arrival, who unexpectedly came that day to shrive her.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, "I cannot collect my ideas sufficiently now. It is impossible."

"What is impossible?" inquired Mother Cecile, who had brought the information, and overheard the remark.

"Impossible for me to confess, mother. I am not prepared, and cannot be, in time."

"Yes, yes, you can! Do not agitate yourself. Calm your scruples, your confessor will wait awhile."

"Mother, I cannot, positively cannot; I know I shall do wrong to attempt it in my state. I am not able to think sufficiently."

"Do not think too much, or be scrupulous. You can do it very well, I am sure, if you try."

Besides, Thursday"—this was Tuesday—"is the feast of Corpus Christi, and you would like to go to communion then, would you not?"

"Yes, mother; but I fear I cannot confess now."

"Oh do not send Father —— away, after his having come so far, especially to hear you. Think of the kindness he manifests in taking so much trouble."

This was an unanswerable objection to Isabel's sensitive mind, and without farther remonstrance she replied, "Very well, I will do as you wish."

Left alone, she tried to bring her mind to a proper frame of recollection. She did so, long and earnestly. But the attempt was absolutely fruitless. No effort could recal one tenth part of what she wished to remember; and with what she could imperfectly, there was so much confusion mingled, that she could not be sure it was correct. Her paper, too, on which she had made memoranda, she had unintentionally destroyed the day before, so that she was in a state of very unenviable perplexity and disquiet when the confessor at length entered.

"I cannot help it," she muttered in despair. "If I sin in doing this, it is not my fault, for I am compelled." And hurrying through the preliminary formula of confession, she quickly repeated all she could remember, candidly telling she could not recollect all.

The priest was kind and patient, and tried to help her. But it was in vain. Every attempt but confused her more; and with a dread

of sacrilege almost overwhelming, she at length was compelled to receive absolution—he not being able to come again under a fortnight, if he left without giving it her now.

She had so much on her conscience, and had said so little—had indulged in so much reasoning, questioning, and speculation, of a character injurious to the church, and had been so unable to explain it. It had seemed as though for the time—doubtless a form of her complaint—all power forsook her, and she was bereft of memory. And now, no sooner was her confessor gone, than all her omissions came crowding in upon her like an armed host; and each unmentioned defect stood out in noonday clearness, seeming, to her excited mind, of great magnitude and importance. But it was useless now; he *was* gone, and regrets were unavailing, and to communion she must go, or disedify the sisterhood.

"Well," she sighed once more, "if I do commit sacrilege in going, I cannot, cannot help it." Notwithstanding every attempt at self-consolation, however, she was uneasy, timorous, and excited. "Oh that I was not obliged to go!" she mentally exclaimed. And again the thought intruded—"Oh, that I was anywhere else where I was not subject to the will of others!" And again utterly miserable, and suffering from an intense degree of nervous irritability, which very, very few save those who have so suffered can comprehend—she would weep from very anxiety and wretchedness.

And now a fine subject of farther condemn-

ation came in, to worry and distress. "A pretty frame of mind you are in for communion," an internal monitor murmured. "Is this peevishness, this anger, your preparation? Where are your devotions, I pray?" Devotion! the question was mockery. Her nervous system was overwrought to the extremest pitch of which it was capable, and yet, to preserve the mind's equilibrium, she could not fix her attention to anything for two consecutive moments, and at least a dozen prayers were commenced and abandoned as a hopeless task.

"I cannot pray," at length she cried, giving up the effort in despair—"I can do *nothing*."

I can do nothing! The words came back upon her like an echo, startling her strangely,—"And did you think you ever could?"

Strange, more than strange, appeared in that moment the folly of all her attempts to do and suffer in order to obtain the favour of God. She *had* thought she could do much. Her whole life, her whole plan of acting, the very groundwork of her present mode of existence, was based on this idea. To *do*, to *do*, for ever, was the sum and substance of her creed. To propitiate heaven by prayers, good works, and mortification, made acceptable in some way or other—she knew not clearly how—by the aid of the Saints and Blessed Virgin, and *finally*, by the merits of Christ, was the means, that creed taught her, through which she might hope to obtain salvation. And she knew not, or forgot, that "God was a jealous God, and would not *give his glory to another*." But now, when she

could do *nought*, when she *felt*, that had the salvation of her soul depended on her performing any one good work, or uttering with a collected mind the most simple prayer, it must have been lost, and lost for ever; when all she had ever done, or tried to do, appeared in its own native hideousness, and, she tremblingly acknowledged, had brought no fruit but utter condemnation and misery; when every future effort seemed hopeless, and she tottered on the brink of the abyss, without an assured faith in Christ, or a *saving* knowledge of Him, when needing a guiding hand to help her weakness, and a Father's love to soothe her sorrows, she was yet a stranger and an alien, and knew not how to cry "Abba, Father, I *know* in whom I have believed." Oh! then it was as though by the hand of Deity itself, or an archangel's touch, the mist cleared from before her eyes, and the dense darkness from her vision, and she saw, in all its unsubstantiality and deformity, the phantom she had been chasing, and the grossness of the delusion to which she had been clinging with the tenacity of life. Then it was that she perceived the utter impotence of man to perform the slightest good, and his irremediable helplessness and defilement in the eyes of his Creator—and acknowledged that, without the Saviour's imputed righteousness, he is lost, ruined, and undone; needing His salvation even from his own works. Oh, there are moments which do the work of years! when all beneath the Creator finds its own paltry level; when things that have before fascinated

and enchain'd the soul, as in links of adamantine might, are spurned as the vilest dross, and cast away as lightly. When seemingly previously fixed ideas and immovable predilections retire, as the wild and baseless memories of some troubled dream,—when heaven comes down to earth, and God himself speaks to the soul, and, by one faint revealing of his ineffable perfections, casts down with irresistible and instantaneous might the poor heart's idols, and wins all its powers into the most intense and absorbing captivity: and, in that blissful and blessed hour, rising as by one gigantic bound to the height for which it was originally created, it sees with a clearness of perception, and loves with a strength of devotion and self-abandonment, of which it before knew not the power, but required alone the excitement to render it susceptible. And thus it was now. Stricken by unearthly might, the ponderous edifice Isabel had been raising for herself crumbled away to dust before the "still small voice" of the Son of God, revealing the whole conventional system, on which she had been building as on a sure foundation, as but a puerile device of man's invention, that could not stand one moment where Deity unveiled His face!

But then there came the recompense—a guerdon of priceless worth! There was at hand the beautifier, to fill up the waste place and make the ruin lovely. Then streamed in the light of heaven—free, fair, and unfettered—*on the emptied and bereaved soul*; then did it

illuminate with its hallowing radiance every crevice, nook, and corner of the desolate and deprived heart. Then was God's own voice heard speaking in the storm, calming every agitation, and saying, " Peace, be still." Then did the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, descend from his eternal throne, and take possession of the earthly one left vacant for him. Then was His gracious power displayed in its softening, renewing, and most lovely form. The icicle was indeed melted, and the barren rock smitten, and tears of unutterable import overflowed the eyes; and emotions, for which language has no expression, filled the bosom. That moment was "the work of faith accomplished with power:" and beneath a rush of long-buried feelings and old ideas, which came thronging back upon her mind and heart—memories of early and happier days—making her wonder how she could ever so have forgotten them, the new-made, yet prodigal child, clinging tremblingly to her Father's bosom, exclaimed, " Father, I have sinned before heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy child: yet, Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief." " Though Thou slay me, yet will I trust in Thee."

And from that hour she *did* trust. It was an era in her life. A new phase of the Divine character had been manifested to her view—its *love*. And rejoicing in the new light as one escaped from a hazardous precipice, from which she was momentarily in danger of being *precipitated* into a yawning gulf, at having gained

a secure and bright and peaceful resting-place, she endeavoured under this love henceforth to take shelter, and give back the only recompense required in return, or which she had to bestow—*her own*. Though from time to time there would still be a coming back to old associations, and momentary subjection to the influences surrounding her—the latest efforts of her spiritual enemy—yet still striving through all to keep “close sheltered in her Saviour’s bleeding side,” the evil was but transient, and ever and anon faded before the light of His countenance. With a mind and heart thus at peace, she gradually recovered, and lost no time in making it known that she had abandoned all idea of embracing the monastic life. This, as may be expected, produced much disappointment, and a great deal of effort and remonstrance. For manifold reasons they would fain have kept the English girl, even apart from her vocation. But it was all in vain. The darkness dispelled by the light of the precious “love of God shed abroad in her heart through faith”—the whole economy of the system she had heretofore worshipped and deemed most holy, became a thing repugnant and intolerable. And she had suffered too much and too keenly from its influence, to allow of any personal consideration for a moment actuating her steps, or binding her to it. In one month from the date of her soul’s escape from the spiritual thraldom in which it had been bound, she had quitted the *convent*; and even the memory of Euphrasia, *though it drew forth some tributary tears from*

nature, failed to quench or dim the feelings of deepest gratitude and praise to God with which she bid adieu to it for ever. While on her return to England, in the same vessel which had transported her thence, deeper emotions still pervaded her bosom, as she remembered the prayer she had then, while treading its narrow planks, offered to the eternal throne, and in how unlooked for and ineffably gracious a manner it had been heard and answered.

Reader, this little history is no fiction. On the contrary, it is but an imperfect and faint attempt to pourtray feelings and experience only too real; though to indulge the idea of ever being able to do so *adequately*, is, and must be, entirely hopeless. The thought has, however, occurred to me, that by entering so largely as I have done into detail and minutiae, I may have incurred the risk of prolixity and tediousness. My aim, however, has been to act simply on the *defensive*, or, in other words, to vindicate myself; and this I could in no way *so* well do as by a faithful record—in as far as I could give it—of the emotions of heart and mind which have produced the result herein described. And, in pursuing this course, I could not well have said less, though I might have said very much more.

Indeed I may safely assert that, with the strictest adherence to truth, I could have considerably extended the limits of the narrative, and *certainly* increased its interest with the

generality of readers, by a recital of many more incidents which have come under my personal observation, if I had been disposed so to do. I have, however, far more satisfaction in writing as I have done; for while I have fulfilled the requirements of my conscience, I have also endeavoured carefully to abstain from aught that might offend against charity, or needlessly wound the feelings of those with whose views I have been compelled to come, thus painfully, into collision. Indeed, I may say that I feel convinced, that even those most disposed to reprehend or censure my performance will not find any real or tangible ground for so doing.

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